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December 12, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group (CI)  
2:00 p.m., Thursday, December 12, 1963

PRESENT: Governor Harriman, Mr. McCone, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Wilson vice Mr. Murrow, Mr. Solbert vice Mr. Gilpatric, Mr. Poats vice Mr. Bell, General Krulak vice General Taylor, Mr. Nolan vice the Attorney General

NSC REVIEW  
COMPLETED,  
6/26/2003

Mr. Hannah and Mr. Mendenhall were present for Items 2 and 3.

Mr. Margolies was present for Item No. 4.

Mr. Cottrell and Mr. Maechling were present for the meeting.

1. Intelligence Summary

Mr. McCone reviewed for the Group the major points contained in the intelligence memoranda distributed for this item. He mentioned that reaction can be expected to the increased pressure being exerted by the anti-Communist forces on the Pathet Lao in Northern and Central Laos. Although Castro support for leftist elements in Peru has not increased, the situation has the potential of becoming serious.

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Mr. McCone reviewed the latest developments in Bolivia, where US hostages are still being held and the situation is extremely serious. Mr. Cottrell added that a recent message from the Country Team indicates that negotiations for release of the hostages hinges on the key issue of how to resolve the problem of exchanging or releasing the Communist mine leaders held in La Paz.

Mr. McCone, in discussing the report on guerrilla activity in the Dominican Republic, stated that the Government is having trouble neutralizing all of the guerrilla bands but has contained them for the time being. The insurgent movement has so far failed to gain significant local support and hopes for outside assistance from Cuba.

Mr. Cottrell stated that he agreed with this report and added that once the present Government is recognized by the U.S., assistance should be given to the Dominican Government to assist in its anti-guerrilla campaign. However, we should move slowly in the resumption of economic and military aid programs.

2. Southeast Asia Status Report

Viet-Nam - Mr. Mendenhall stated that the war is going badly and pointed out specific reasons why there has been lack of progress in the Delta area. He added, however, that a number of recommendations are now being considered to reverse this trend.

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It has been difficult to get Strategic Hamlet moving again because of the lack of central direction and the re-establishment of administrative controls. Mr. Mendenhall believes that it will take some time for the new Government to improve this condition.

Mr. McCone commented that a recent report has been brought to his attention which states that the situation in Long An Province is rapidly deteriorating. He asked if all the responsible agencies agreed with this appraisal. There was general agreement that the situation in this province is serious and that prompt action is needed.

Mr. McCone stated that the responsibility of the Group to follow up reports on Viet-Nam, that indicate a need for action, should be clarified. During the last few months, the Group had received advanced warning by various individuals that the hamlet program in the Delta was becoming over extended but apparently no action was taken to look into this situation.

The Chairman suggested that following Secretary McNamara's trip to Viet-Nam, the role of the Group to follow up on the execution of programs for Viet-Nam should be reviewed and clarified.

Thailand - Mr. Hannah reported that, in general, all programs related to internal security are progressing satisfactorily and it is planned to follow up on those programs that require special attention. Problems will undoubtedly arise as a result of Sarit's death. Although Thanom has been named Prime Minister, it is believed that there will be considerable maneuvering for power by various rivals and cliques. However, at this time the political situation looks favorable.

The Country Team has been asked to report by the end of the month on progress that has been made to get the Thai Government to prepare their own version of the Internal Security Plan.

The Group requested that Defense submit a full report as soon as possible on what additional steps will be taken to correct the deficiencies in the locomotives sent to Thailand.

### 3. Remarks by Mr. Forrestal

Viet-Nam - Mr. Forrestal stated that he agreed that the situation in the Delta was serious and that one of the reasons that this has not been uncovered before is that previous reports on progress at the province level had been too optimistic.

He observed that there is inertia within the new Government; although they recognized that they have problems, little has been done to resolve them, or to take positive action. He recommended that the US Government get across to the key generals that they should stop political quarreling and concentrate on the war effort in threatened provinces. We should assist the current Government in the preparation of a new hamlet program in order to get this program moving as soon as possible. If we concentrate on the war, and not divert our attention to marginal problems, the chances of success will be

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greatly enhanced. He recommends that a high priority be given to the Delta.

Mr. McCone added that the Amnesty Program is important and should be included as part of any accelerated program.

During a discussion on the validity of reports on progress in the provinces, Mr. Forrestal stated that it should be understood that normally there are only two US advisors at the province level, one representing the military and the other the AID mission. These individuals have only a limited opportunity to obtain a detailed assessment of the situation and, by necessity, have to rely on the province officials as their chief source of information.

Cambodia - Mr. Forrestal stated that he had a strong feeling that Sihanouk is very close to a decision to terminate US presence and we should be aware that Cambodia is going to the left. Sihanouk is highly irrational and has placed himself in a position from which he would find it difficult to back down. Mr. Forrestal recommended that: evacuation plans for US personnel be reviewed as it might be necessary to execute these plans quickly; and, Defense and CIA should examine problems that might develop on the SVN/Cambodia Border.

Laos - Mr. Forrestal stated that he detected a sense of frustration building up in Vientiane. Coup rumors exist and various factions are maneuvering for power. Nevertheless, our people have confidence in the military situation in the Plaine des Jarres. In general, Mr. Forrestal believes that the West's position in Laos is about as good as it was last year.

Thailand - Mr. Forrestal believes that the Country Team should examine procedures to better coordinate programs in the Northeast provinces.

#### 4. Situation in Venezuela

Mr. Margolies commented that terrorism will continue until the new Government is firmly established. He reviewed the official results of the election which indicate that a stable Government headed by Leoni will probably prove viable.

The Chairman commented that he hoped that at the next meeting it will be possible to provide an appraisal of the likely composition of the new Government.

*James W. Dingeman*  
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Special Group (CI)

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